

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE ANGELA DODGE
THURSDAY, DEC. 4, 2008 PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER
WWW.USDOJ.GOV/USAO/TXS (713) 567-9388

BORDER PATROL AGENT INDICTED FOR BRIBERY AND NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING

(LAREDO, Texas) – A U.S. Border Patrol (BP) agent has been indicted for allegedly accepting bribes in exchange for escorting a narcotics load, acting United States Attorney Tim Johnson announced today. Leonel Morales, 30, of Zapata County, was arrested late Wednesday, Dec. 3, 2008, by the FBI without incident. He made his initial appearance before a United States Magistrate Judge in Laredo today and has been ordered temporarily detained pending a detention hearing set for Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2008. Morales is a Border Patrol agent assigned to the Laredo sector.

The three-count indictment returned under seal by a Houston grand jury Monday, Dec. 1, 2008, was unsealed by the court at Morales' initial appearance. The first count of the indictment charges that Morales, while employed as a BP agent, corruptly demanded, received and accepted approximately \$9,000 in bribes to escort a narcotics load between June 7, 2008, through Aug. 28, 2008, in violation of the lawful official duty of a United States BP agent. Morales is accused in the second count of the indictment with conspiring with others to possess with intent to distribute more than five kilograms of cocaine between June 7, 2008, through Sept. 11, 2008. The third and last count charges Morales with possession with intent to distribute more than five kilograms of cocaine from June 7, 2008, through Aug. 28, 2008.

"The recent arrest of Leonel Morales is a reminder of the severe consequences of succumbing to avarice and the promise of ill-gotten gains," said Carlos X. Carrillo, Chief Patrol Agent, Laredo Sector. "The men and women of the U.S. Border Patrol and the Laredo Sector, who each day perform their duty with honor and integrity on America's frontline, remain staunchly committed to defending the rule of law and the security of our nation."

A bribery conviction carries a penalty of imprisonment of not more than 15 years and/or a fine not more than three times the monetary equivalent of the bribe. A conviction for conspiracy or possession with intent to distribute more than five kilograms of cocaine carries a penalty of imprisonment of not less than 10 years up to life imprisonment and/or a \$4 million fine.

The charges against Morales are the result of an investigation conducted by the Laredo Office of the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security – Office of Inspector General, Customs and Border Protection Internal Affairs and Customs and Border Protection/U.S. Border Patrol. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Michael Wright of the Public Corruption Section of the U.S. Attorney's Office.

A indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence. The defendant is presumed innocent unless and until convicted through due process of law.

###